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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the personal values of a group of 17 kindergarten-age children. Children participated in a classroom discussion of heroes and heroines, then drew a picture of their heroes or heroines. The researcher analyzed each child's artwork and determined the outstanding values represented by the hero or heroine. A parallel was drawn between the values of heroes and heroines and this group of children's developing values. The findings indicated that the children were learning concepts, values, and behaviors from television. Fourteen of the children drew pictures of characters who were involved in violent behavior such as fighting. Three of the children identified heroes or heroines as role models with positive images and no evidence of negative behavior such as fighting. The study suggests that children's artwork offers many insights into children's development of moral values. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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CHILDREN'S HEROES AND HEROINES: DEVELOPING VALUES MANIFESTED THROUGH ARTWORK

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Presented at the annual meeting of
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Children's Heroes and Heroines: Developing Values

Manifested Through Artwork

Purpose

At the heart of any character education program are the moral values that children are expected to develop and that teachers will be expected to encourage and model. Values are a unique kind of idea (Parker & Jarolimek, 1997) and include social values as well as democratic values (Parker & Jarolimek, 1997; Spodek, 1994). These ideas include concern for the worth of the individual and the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; ideas of freedom and responsibility; ideas of justice; ideas concerning the safety of persons and property; and ideas of equality of opportunity (Parker and Jarolimek, 1997; Spodek, 1994).

From the moment a classroom teacher walks through the school house doors, he/she will be teaching values - whether they want to or not. Throughout the day children will be looking and listening to those significant adults around them. Children will, in turn, imitate the adult behavior and assimilate the values as they perceive them (Spodek, 1994). The classroom becomes an educative force where values are learned.

The purpose of this research was to assess the personal values of a select group of kindergarten age children. It was determined that children's values would best be reflected through the drawings of heroes and heroines. Heroes and heroines are defined as people whose qualities are admired by fellow members of a social group (Fowler,1980).

Literature Review

Young children have a difficult time expressing themselves verbally (Protherough, 1983; Smith, 1976). Art offers children an opportunity to create something with which they may identify (Carson, 1985). According to Goldberg (1992), artistic expression allows children to express what they know and what they understand in another medium. Britsch (1993) further stated that children use their drawings to tell a story.

In an effort to investigate multiple ways of knowing, Clyde (1994) entered a first grade classroom as a co-teacher instead of as a visitor. She found that, through artwork, one child was better able to express his thought and his knowledge on a particular subject. According to Clyde, "the more global nature of art provided a more compatible format for Douglas' ideas" (p. 28).

Through the incorporation of art and drawing into high school honors English classes, Claggett and Brown (1992) found that students were better able to make

meaning as they read and as they wrote. They stated that students were able to move from the visual to the verbal by talking about their drawings. Drawings enabled them to discover, develop, and confirm their own ideas and perceptions.

In conclusion, artwork allows younger and older students an avenue of self-expression. Through various media, children are able to express what they know. Later, this lends itself tot he enhancement of verbal expression.

Methodology

Research Design

While the research method for this study was qualitative, the research design followed an interpretative approach. This design allowed for interviews and content analysis (Vierra & Pollock, 1988). According to Noblit and Hare (1988), "an interpretation enables the reader to translate the case studied into his or her own social understanding. Interpretive accounts, above all, provide a perspective and, in so doing, achieve the goal of enhancing human discourse" (p. 18). Merriam (1988) further stated that, because of the "thick description" (p. 28), interpretative case studies may actually illustrate or support theoretical assumptions.

Method

This study consisted of 17 kindergarten children from an elementary school in Calhoun County, Alabama. Children participated in a classroom discussion of heroes and heroines. Each child then drew a picture of his/her hero or heroine. The researcher analyzed the artwork of each child and determined the outstanding values represented by the hero or heroine. A parallel was then drawn between the values of heroes and heroines and this group of children's developing values.

Findings

The findings indicated that children are learning concepts, values, and behaviors from television. Fourteen of the children drew pictures of characters who were involved in violent behavior such as fighting. Three of the children identified, as heroes or heroines, role models with positive images and no evidences of negative behavior such as fighting. Refer to Table 1 for complete information.

Implications

Protherough (1983) contended that young children have a difficult time expressing themselves and what they know orally. The findings of this study are significant in that they suggest to the classroom teacher that children's artwork

offer many insights into children's development of moral values. Artwork may be used as a tool in the assessment of these developing values.

A significant finding was the influence of mass media on young children and their choice of a hero or heroine. This parallels the concerns of others in the role mass media plays in socializing young children into violence (American Psychological Association, 1993; Garbarino, 1992; Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1995). According to Boyatzis (1997) and Huesmann (1994), the high status of role models or heroes is reason for us to be worried because the more a hero is rewarded for participating in an aggressive act, the more likely children will be to imitate the aggressive act.

Table 1

Children's Heroes and Heroines

HEROES & HEROINES	**MALE**	**FEMALE**
Aquaman	X	X
Babe	X	
Batman	X X X	
Cat Woman		X
George of the Jungle	X	
Hercules	X	X
Jake the Snake	X	
Momma	X	
Robin	X	
Superman	X X X	
Wonderwoman		X

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